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The Greatness of God; Psalm 48  
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Introduction – What does it mean to be great? What is greatness? We speak of many things as being great. That was a great game. She is a great person. We speak of great battles, great days, great moments. We honor those who lived during WWII as the greatest generation. So what is greatness? After listing 25 various ways the word great is used, Webster says, “The sense of great is to be understood by the things it is intended to qualify.”

Think about that in reference to God – the sense of great is to be understood by the things it is intended to qualify. If we intend to describe God, then what does greatness mean? Since God stands apart and above all creation, is eternally vast and inexhaustible, and the origination of every virtue, then what does it mean to attribute greatness to God? You’ve heard it said that absolute power corrupts absolutely, and that is certainly the case with humanity. However, when it comes to God, He is truly the only holder of absolute power and yet there isn’t a shade of corruption in Him – so what does it mean to say that God is great? At some point language itself fails to capture the meaning of the greatness of God, and yet we cannot help but proclaim how great is our God. The heart of Psalm 48 is an attempt to describe the indescribable.

- I. Great is the Lord (vv1-3)
  - a. As with so many of the psalms, v1 serves as the title or heading and the following verses unfold or unpack the title. Read v1.
    - i. What is the city of God? Augustine was born in North Africa in 354. In 386 Augustine overheard a child sing, “Take up and read” and he wondered what that meant. He was counseled by Ambrose to take up the Bible and read and in doing so he read Romans 13:13-14, “put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh.” And as a result, Augustine was wonderfully converted to the Christian faith. In 395 he became the bishop of Hippo, in north Africa and for the next 35 years made such an impact on the world and the church that this period of time became known as the Age of Augustine. One of his most prized works is called the City of God. In it Augustine writes that there are two cities in the world and throughout history, the city of men and the

city of God. The City of God is composed of all created beings who love and worship God, both men and angels. The city of men is composed of all who reject God, both men and demons. At one point in this remarkable treatise of history and redemption, Augustine defines the city of God as “the perfectly ordered and harmonious communion of those who find their joy in God, and in one another in God.”

- ii. That understanding of the city of God certainly fits with the fullest meaning of Psalm 48. The city of God spiritually refers to believers, the church, the redeemed, who joy in God and in one another in God.
- b. Read v1 again. Spurgeon writes, “According to his nature should his worship be; it cannot be too constant, too laudatory, too earnest, too reverential, too sublime. There is none like the Lord, and there should be no praises like his praises.”
- c. Vv2-3. The connection to Psalm 46:11.
- d. God is great, and His people of all people know that He is great. He is our fortress and our joy, and therefore we greatly praise Him!

## II. Great is the Lord Above All (vv4-8)

- a. Now there are those, to use Augustine’s terms, who dwell in the city of men rather than the city of God. They do not ascribe greatness to God or worship Him. In fact, in remarkable inconsistency, they rage against the God they say does not exist and does not hold authority and sway over their lives.
- b. And yet the greatness of God will not be denied and will not go unseen, unfelt and unknown even by those who reject it. You see, God is great whether we acknowledge it or not. His greatness is not subjective or determined by our analysis or obstinate objection. His greatness is not determined in the eye of the beholder – His greatness overwhelms the eye of the beholder!
- c. As with most psalms, there is usually a historical context that gives rise to the psalm. Sometimes the psalm itself will announce its reference point. We don’t know for sure the historical background of this psalm, but many have suggested that 2 Chronicles 20 fits well. Read 2 Chron 20:14-30.
  - i. That sounds like Psalm 48 doesn’t it? Spurgeon writes of God’s enemies in Psalm 48, “They came, they saw, but they did not conquer. There was no *veni, vidi, vici* for them.”

- d. Now the thing about the psalms is that while they often refer to a historical event, the meaning of the psalm itself is never fully grounded or tied to the historical event. The psalm is not meant to find its fullest meaning in history but rather in God. The history behind the psalm simply serves as an example in support of the psalm's proclamation about God. Psalm 48 is not written just to describe the events of Judah in 2 Chron 20, but rather it is written to describe who God is, who He is to His people, and who He is to His enemies for all time.
- e. Is this for me "Am I a citizen of the city of God? Is He my joy? Is He my fortress? Will He fight my battles on my behalf? Am I safe in Him when I face the hordes of opposition?" If you are in Christ, you are in the city of God! V8.
- f. Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised!

### III. Great is the Lord to His People (vv9-14)

- a. Going back to our initial question in the introduction – what does it mean to attribute greatness to God? That's exactly what the psalmist is doing in these verses – explaining and proclaiming the greatness of God that he declared in v1.
- b. V9 – steadfast love – uncompromised, unbroken, undeserved love of God. The love of God is greater far than tongue or pen could ever tell, it goes beyond the highest star and reaches to the lowest hell; the guilty pair, bowed down with care, God gave His Son to win; His erring child He reconciled, and pardoned from his sin. O Love of God, how rich and pure! How measureless and strong! It shall forevermore endure the saints and angels song!
  - i. Psalm 86:5 – For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you.
  - ii. God is known by His steadfast love.
  - iii. Such a tragedy in our day that we have so skewed the word love that we can speak of it in such crude, trifle manner as falling in love and falling out of love. You know what that word steadfast means – you don't fall out of God's love and He doesn't fall out of love with you!
- c. V10 – His name, His praise, and His righteousness. His name is His fame. His name is His character, His revelation, His Word, His Gospel, His Son. As His name extends to the ends of the earth, so will His praise extend to the ends of the earth! There is no tribe or

tongue or people where He will not be praised! Once He is known; He is praised! That's how great is our God!

- i. His right hand – signifying His strength, His power, His rule is filled with righteousness – He is right in everything He does. He wields His power not only to display His might but to bring about what is right.
- ii. With God it isn't might makes right but rather might is right.
- d. V11 – The people of God rejoice in Him and in His judgments. Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised.
- e. Vv12-14
  - i. Take a look at how sure and certain and unconquerable is the church of the Lord Jesus Christ! He said, "I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." Shall anything separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord? We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us? Walk about Zion and see. His church will remain. His people will not be defeated. His people will be saved.
  - ii. Now tell that to the next generation. Parents, that's our message to our children. This is God.
    1. We don't get our view of God from Hollywood's pathetic portrayal of a deity in our own image. We don't get our view of God from the next star athlete or performer who talks about how much they love God one minute and how much they embrace the world the next. We don't get our view of God out of a textbook written with an agenda to deny God or a college professor's pseudo-intellectual belief in nothing. We get our view of God from God! We get our view of God from Psalm 48.
  - iii. Our God is forever and ever. Long after all His deniers and enemies have been dead for ages – our God is forever and ever. He will guide us forever – that means beyond the grave. When we are dead, gone, and forgotten in this world, we will be with Him and He will still be God and He will still be great.

Conclusion – What does it mean to say that God is great? There's only one way to find out. Come to Christ and spend forever with Him!